

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, December 18, 2019

Reference text: L. Giussani, S. Alberto, and J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen's University Press, pp. 11–20.

- *My song is love unknown*
- *La notte che ho visto le stelle (The night I saw the stars)*

Glory Be

What is an event is the point of *Generating Traces* with which we begin our work of School of Community today. The first thing we must always keep in mind, and to which we must be constantly recalled in order to be faithful to the charism, is the method, that is, experience. So let's verify our experience: who has been amazed by something in the work of these recent weeks? We may have worked on the theme of the event, but without recognizing the event as it happened; in this situation, the School of Community becomes a large pot in which we throw words. In doing so we only increase nihilism because nothing happens. With the word "event" on our lips only nothing happens. Let's not take this for granted, because it isn't by making comments on the event that I become aware of the it, but rather when I am surprised at something unexpected that happens. Now everyone, based on what he or she has recognized, will be able to converse with all those who make a contribution this evening, and verify whether the experience he or she has had answers the questions that have emerged along the way.

I thank you for the journey of self-awareness that you are helping me make. The more time passes, the more the awareness of the gift that was my encounter with the movement many years ago grows deeper in me. Today I can say that my desire to follow the movement has grown, and with it my knowledge and affection for Christ have grown. I increasingly experience the relevance of Christ to my life in the fullness of meaning he gives to things in my life and to my person. All of this certainly depends on the fact that for me the opportunities to meet an authority are many and very convincing. I have many friends from whom a glance is often enough to be called back to who I am and to what I am made for. For this reason, starting from Beginning Day, I had no difficulty in tracing back the meaning of the words "authority" and "event" (which for me coincide) to these experiences. During a few meetings of the School of Community, however, it seemed to me that the coincidence between the encounter with Christ and the carnality of Christians didn't emerge clearly; in particular, the passages in which we talk about all reality as an event have sometimes been confusing. Looking at my experience, my encounters with the sky and the mountains and with colleagues who are particularly alive, with children, the poor, and the sick, are certainly all events, but recognizing them as such and therefore recognizing their connection with Christ, would be impossible for me without an encounter with the humanity of Jesus, without an encounter that changed and changes me. In my opinion, the event of the encounter with the carnality of Christ, that is, with those who have faith, is of a higher order and of a different nature and has a unique content as compared with any other event. Is what I think wrong? Am I simplifying too much? How do you explain the statement contained in the School of Community that "creation is an event" (p. 12)? It is true because creation is happening now. It is important to keep that in mind, because you are saying something fundamental, but it is necessary to understand it within the

context in which that statement is made. Recognizing reality as a sign of the Mystery, as something that refers to the Mystery — not as the result of an act of reasoning, but as a recognition of a fact that is happening now, that the Mystery is making happen now — is within the reach of everyone, as St. Paul says at the beginning of the letter to the Romans: everyone can perceive the Mystery “through the works He has done” (Rom 1:20). Thus, there is no opposition. However, you say something that is historically correct: although there is this possibility expressed by St. Paul — which we can never deny to ourselves — historically, due to our condition, to our difficulty, of which *Generating Traces* speaks, in grasping reality as it happens because of a wound we have in us, on many occasions we cannot recognize it, so that this possibility doesn’t become actual, is not realized. It amazes me how the Gospels document the daily experience of Jesus, which is something we often take for granted. The historical presence of a man, Jesus of Nazareth, documents what life can become when one experiences reality by intercepting the event while it is happening: “The dynamic of the event describes every instant of life: the flower of the field which ‘the Father clothes better than Solomon’ is an event [Jesus captures it while it is happening: it is the Father who is clothes the flower in beauty, which not even Solomon is able to do]; the bird that falls ‘and the Heavenly Father knows it’ is an event; ‘the hairs on your head are numbered,’ they are an event [...] that still occurs today as something new, since their explanation is inexhaustible. To glimpse something greater in the relationship with everything means that the relationship itself is event” (p. 12). This is the contribution that Jesus made — as you said very well — in history: without Him we cannot look at reality like this, with this immediacy; that is possible only by belonging to the event that He began to accomplish in the world. It is surprising to see how Jesus embodies a way of relating with reality that is true, as if He is telling us, “Guys, you can live reality in this way, you can live with an ability to grasp all the power it has, all the newness it brings.” In the company of Jesus this possibility can become familiar, as you are seeing in your life. That is why we need to better understand his gaze on reality, because “if man [this is the crucial phrase] does not look at the world as something given, as an event, starting from the gesture of God which gives it to him now [if we do not grasp this as Jesus grasps it], it loses all its attraction [we miss that which is best], surprise, and moral appeal” (p. 12), and everything becomes flat. The purpose of the fact that Jesus accompanies us is precisely this, that recognizing everything as an event become familiar to us. Without him achieving this recognition would be an exception. Yet, sometimes — and so we go on in today’s work — the question arises whether everything is an event, especially when a particular situation is painful.

In the work of School of Community in this recent period, a friend of ours asked, “How do you interpret, look objectively at the circumstances that happen?” I carried that question and the term “objective” with me during the following days, trying to avoid the risk of sticking on it a logical answer that made sense and thus closing it. A few days earlier, a very young nephew of mine died suddenly of a heart attack. When the news came to me I was at home. I was shocked, and the first thing that came to my mind was to open the book of School of Community and start reading. At that moment, nothing else seemed more adequate to me for facing such a shocking event. Viewing the body of my nephew in silence in the morgue, the words of the School of Community that I had devoured earlier as never before, came to life; the comparison between what was happening there and the meaning of the word “event” that I had read in the book was fixed in my mind and in my heart: it is a fact “always ‘vanishing’ into the unforeseeable [...] that surfaces within experience and reveals the Mystery that constitutes it. [...] A place where the reality that can be experienced and Mystery ‘coincide’” (p. 13). A new and unexpected factor had entered my open wound that

was giving me back all of my humanity, something that every good effort of mine had not been able to do. What was it that I perceived present in my gaze and that concretely gave peace to my heart in such a dramatic situation — so much so as to desire not to lose it again, ever — if not a real exceptional presence, “to whom I can say You, who says, ‘Without me you can do nothing’” (p. 16)? Please help me understand whether every circumstance is truly an event and whether that term “objective” coincides with being able to “grasp, instant by instant, the relationship of everything with the origin! [that involves] a definitive relationship with the Mystery, and so nothing is lost” of what we are, but rather understanding that, as we read in point 4, “this is our happiness” (p. 14).

The answer to your question is already contained in what you said. Now you must realize what you have experienced, because “in my open wound,” as you said, “a new unexpected factor has entered,” which — this is the power of Christ! — gives you back all your humanity, so that you are able to see everything that is happening in light of the unique exceptionality that allows you to say “you” even in that situation, in the course of living that situation, not alongside, after, or before it, and without which you would be defeated. That is the answer to your question: any circumstance, even if painful, can become an occasion to recognize the exceptional nature of the event that is happening before your eyes. That is why it is essential that nothing is spared us, because we must see Him win the circumstances, not elsewhere. Who has seen Christ victorious in the midst of a painful situation?

When I read the agenda for the retreat of the Fraternity, I thought back to the experience of paternity which, unwittingly, I have lived in the last few months as I accompanied my mother in her illness. The news came like lightning, and after a round of phone calls I realized that the situation was very serious. I immediately spoke to some friends asking them to help me understand this situation, because the reality of it scared me a lot. None of the doctors had the courage to speak clearly to my mother; they left me the task of giving her the news. You can imagine the tiredness and the sorrow. It seemed to me a total denial of my desire for eternity, which at that moment was clearer than ever. I was angry and disappointed. Yet in the struggle that accompanied me in these days, there was always a connecting thread, represented by the faces of some friends and of my husband and my son, none of whom abandoned me. Even as many told me that life is only a great injustice, those faces forced me to stay in the present. It was their presence that forced me to ask myself what was good for me in the situation. So even as I was in deep sorrow, wonder and gratitude began to make themselves present in a totally unexpected way. When things got worse, my mom was taken to hospice. Accompanying her was another trial for me. As soon as I arrived, I discovered that a priest, a friend of ours, was also hospitalized there. When I went to see him I couldn't hold back — I spoke to him about all my questions and objections. I am grateful to him because he never tried to give me answers — instead, he valued my infinite desire for meaning, justice, and beauty. His paternity and the company of some friends helped me change. I had to surrender to the evidence that there was something good for me in all of this. At some point, the way I was looking at things was no longer the same. I was deeply saddened, but serene, no longer angry. I also looked at my mom in a different way! I realized that until then I had looked at her because of her illness, but now it seemed clear to me that she was much more than her illness. One of the moments in which I experienced this good for me was when our friend the priest got up and walked the length of the hallway so that he could bend over my dying mom to give her absolution of her sins. At that moment, it was as if God had bent over us and embraced us. My father — with all his past, he who always kept his distance from the Church — wanted to get to

know, as he said, the “priest who was like a rock.” When I saw him speaking to my father in such a paternal way, I really wondered “who was He” who attracted my father even through a frail and sick body, so much so that when the priest died he attended his funeral. The thing I need most now is to be able to relive the experience of those months every day because the past is not enough for me! I need to see the signs of His presence at least for an instant every day. I need to know today that He is with me every day, until the end of the world.

Hence, “even as I was in deep sorrow, wonder and gratitude began to make themselves present in a totally unexpected way [the fruit of a lived fatherhood]; I was deeply saddened, but serene.” Christ did not come to spare us pain, but to make himself a companion to our life, so that we can live sorrow with a meaning. What does it take to be able to experience this continually every day? That is the big question because, as we read in point 4 of the School of Community, the event is “the word that the modern mentality [...] finds hardest to understand and to accept,” because there is a resistance in us that can only be overcome “by those who are pure in heart and childlike in soul” (p. 13). It isn’t that something doesn’t happen, but that a simplicity is needed to recognize it. Only that recognition can reawaken us to ourselves and to the truth of our life. Where have we seen this happen?

A few days ago there was a dinner of my former high school classmates. There were some we hadn’t been in contact with for more than thirty years. I came up with the idea and organized everything. It was a beautiful evening. At the end, dedicated to each of them, I read aloud some of the verses of *Mia Giovinezza [My youth]* by Ada Negri. (“I haven’t lost you. You are just different, more beautiful. / You love, and you think you aren’t loved: for every [...] baby that is born, to God [...] you give thanks in your heart.”) I told them that that is how I feel about the years and about the present time. One person wanted to take a picture of the book page. Then, I gave everyone the small Christmas poster rolled and tied with a bow in the form of a greeting card. They opened and read it, and one person was struck by the words of Manzoni’s text that says, “I need to talk to you! I need to hear your voice and see your face! I need you!” Everyone was amazed and grateful about the fact that I had offered that thought for them. I felt free to express myself, grateful for the encounter that took hold of me at 16, when God gave me those schoolmates and our teacher, an encounter that, without any merit of mine, continues to happen to me now. I was so struck to read on page 18 of the School of Community that “the person we come across becomes an encounter if we find him engaged in a ‘different’ way — with a difference that attracts us — in the things everyone does; if, that is, as he speaks, eats, and drinks, he perceptibly makes a qualitative difference and offers it to our existence, causing us to go away struck by the fact that eating and drinking have an absolute meaning, and a word spoken in fun has an eternal value.” This thought has also come to me in looking at my students, every day, every year, the GS kids, those who are now in university, and the young ones who are in GS this year. What will become of them? I too was in their place, and cannot help but see how that fragile reality bore fruit thanks to the work of an Other! So every Wednesday we go to School of Community to see what the Lord is making happen in our lives. One of the younger kids said that he doesn’t know clearly what attracts him in our getting together every week, but he has begun to look forward to the day of the School of Community and to the study group. We talk, we compare ourselves with Fr. Giussani’s answers that take us aback, and with yours, Fr. Carrón, and with those of Fr. Pigi, all of which offer to us the answers of Jesus. We help each other to understand and then allow time to let the provocations

and questions mature, inviting the students to be loyal to a journey, and to share in the steps, the proposals, and the observations of us adults. I find myself waiting for Him in everything, in family relationships, even in the return of my older children from Milan, in the hallways and in the classrooms at school, in the oral exams that await me tomorrow. Thank you for your friendship and fatherhood.

When you have this purity of heart that the last person who has arrived can witness to us — like those ex-classmates or those GS boys who want to see every week what the Lord is making happen, and even that young kid who can't wait for the day of School of Community! — we begin to grasp hold of any of the signs of that newness that remain present in history. Then you let this grasping hold mature in time according to a design that is not ours. It is amazing to compare this with what Fr. Giussani, who always witnesses to us, writes in speaking of these things, briefly describing his experience: “What intensity of life is promised to those who grasp, instant by instant, the relationship of everything with the origin! [it is to this intensity that we are called; we are not here to waste time just speaking about it; we are actually called to experience this intensity in everything we touch] [...] This is our happiness” (p. 14). He doesn't use trivial words, but rather words full of meaning that express a human intensity. So the verification of whether we really grasp the event in its happening is that reality acquires this intensity and brings us happiness because it is full of the attraction we were talking about earlier. Therefore, agreeing to make this journey by following the way in which the mystery makes it happen is decisive. Yet, drama always re-emerges. What does it consist of?

As you have pointed out, in point 4 of the School of Community we read: “What intensity of life is promised to those who grasp, instant by instant, the relationship of everything with the origin! Each instant enjoys a definitive relationship with the Mystery, and so nothing is lost: this is what we exist for, and this is our happiness.” Many times, though, I live exactly in the way described in the following lines: “Yet, there is a wound in man's heart that distorts something inside him and he cannot, by his own strength, remain in truth” (p. 14). A few days ago a colleague told me that he wants to be involved with scientific research and not drown in bureaucracy and deadlines. I too often think, “I studied so that I could do certain things and now I have to waste time on something else.” Are the thousands of requests in everyday life that seem to take you away from what you should be doing events as well? Are they a stumbling block or are they part of the journey? In you and in some friends, I recognize people who don't live like that, but that doesn't seem to be enough.

So: the tasks of every day, the daily life “that cripples a man” (Pavese), are they only stumbling blocks or are they part of the journey? Life is vocation, we walk toward destiny through these things! Who has discovered this?

Hi, Julián.

Hi. How have you discovered it?

The last few months have been a bit trying because of many things that have happened, and lately a colleague of mine who treats me really poorly has added to my trials. One day she went too far and I went home feeling very upset. I brooded over what had happened and decided that I had to solve the problem. I told myself that there were two ways to go about it: direct confrontation, and therefore a real fight, or adopting an attitude that I considered more “Christian” of tolerance and

endurance. The next day I drove to the office as usual with this concern in my mind, when unexpectedly, at a rotary, a friend drove past me! I started honking, and he recognized me and decided to call me. We had a good chat in which the theme was our lives, our desire. It was half an hour of breathing freely! I didn't mention to him the problem preoccupying me when I had gotten up that morning, but when I entered the office and saw my colleague I was so happy that I just wanted to hug her! I couldn't do it because our relationship doesn't allow it, but I greeted her with joy. In the evening — as my friend had suggested to me, in order not to overlook the things that happen — I read a few lines from the School of Community, in particular, “Christianity is an event. There is no other word to indicate its nature, neither the word law, nor the words ideology, concept or plan. Christianity is not a religious doctrine, a series of moral laws, a collection of rites. Christianity is a fact, an event. All the rest is a consequence” (p. 9). I think what is described here happened the other morning. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for everything.

Faced with a difficulty, our first hypothesis is to respond with either confrontation or endurance, but there is another possibility: that the unexpected happens, like on that morning. Through a casual encounter something new enters that breaks the mechanism of either confrontation or endurance — something that doesn't spare us the effort we need to make, but that frees us. A presence invades us that makes us want to embrace those we considered an enemy. For this reason, returning to the previous contribution, every stumbling block is an opportunity to recognize the event that is happening. This makes us understand the difference between religious sense and faith, of which Fr. Giussani speaks in point 5.

A year and a half ago, during an assembly, you corrected me by telling me to give credit and anchor myself, not to my reasoning which cannot adequately describe either myself or anyone else, but to the facts that strike me. At that time, the very concrete alternative was between my reflections and the fact of a simple dinner, during which I realized that I was preferred by the Mystery. During that meeting you stopped me in the course of my analysis, insisting: “The dinner! The dinner!”

Either thoughts or facts.

*The message came to me loud and clear. I also put it on my social profile as a motto: “The dinner!” The path that opened had a fascinating intensity, because the facts, always there in front of me, began to become more significant. I found myself continually called to come to terms with what happens in me in the face of facts, to follow them, to follow a path that opens up between one exceptional fact and another. The exceptional events have multiplied dramatically. Lately, as you know, I am rediscovering the path of John Henry Newman in preparing to present the book of the month to many friends (J.H. Newman, *Il cuore del mondo [The heart of the world]: Anthology of Writings*, Bur, Milan 2011). I have known about him for about ten years, but now he speaks to me with a new intensity because his journey was precisely an obedience to the facts that led him to the point of recognizing in experience the authority of Christ and the Church. Two evenings ago at Mass I was moved to hear the Gospel of the encounter between Jesus and some of the chief priests and elders, who asked Him: “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?” The Gospel notes that Jesus answers by asking them a single question that forces them to deal with their experience: “Was John's baptism of heavenly or of human origin?” (Mk 11: 28–30). At the meeting a year and a half ago I was looked at in the same way, called back to the method of experience. Those leaders and elders were placed by Jesus in response*

to two alternatives: drawing conclusions from my own and other people's analyses or facing the exceptional correspondence of the facts. With that question, Jesus puts them in front of the answer they already have in experience — they are cornered and pretend that they don't know the answer to the question. This being recalled to look at what happens in me in front of the facts as an exceptional correspondence is the gesture that most enhances my freedom and that allows me to make a personal journey. In this regard, a passage from the *School of Community* surprises me: "The answer to the Christian problem — 'Who is Jesus?' — is deduced from pre-constituted conceptions about man and the world. Yet Jesus's answer is, 'Look at my works'; in other words, 'Look at me,' which is the same thing. Yet people don't look Him in the face, they eliminate Him before taking Him into consideration" (p. 17). By your invitation to pay attention to the dinner, you called me to be attentive to the event of Jesus! Thank you.

This is what the event of Christ constantly reminds us of — we can educate ourselves to follow the facts or we can get stuck in our analyses, which we use to eliminate the event. It isn't that we explicitly deny it, but we actually eliminate it from the horizon of our lives without blinking an eye. Yet, even facing Jesus's exhortation, "Look at my works," that is, "Look at me," we can remain suspended, halfway. How can this happen?

There is one thing that I realize I haven't fully grasped. At the beginning of point 6, Fr. Giussani says, "Jesus's face has the shape of human faces," and further on, "Encounter therefore [...] is the appearing of the event of the Mystery present within the precariousness of a human form" (pp. 17–18). I believe I have grasped the scope of these statements because, if I think back to my brief history, that is what has happened, to the point that within that encounter Christ asked me for my whole life. This was clear from the start, and immediately from the beginning of my encounter He made himself visible with His unmistakable features. Now my question is this: precisely because of this circumstance that was so decisive, the encounter I had bonded me to Christ by binding me to the "human form" through which He manifested himself the first time. Yet, sometimes it seems to me that, due to my distraction, my bond with these people obscures its origin. I feel connected to these people, I love them very much, period, and I feel fine with that. Yet, when I notice that "feeling fine," I also discover that I am sad. How can I be helped to keep my heart awake for the One who gives and gave me these faces without either making them something absolute or reducing them?

In order to intercept our humanity, Jesus became flesh and continues to be flesh reaching us through faces, as you said. Yet, many times — as we often have to admit — we stop at these faces, and say, "I am fine with that." Then, when we see that this doesn't correspond to what we really desire, we begin to blame ourselves. We are poor wretches, so why are we surprised if sometimes we get stuck and remain tied to these faces without getting to their meaning? Yet you said something that in my opinion is very important for a human journey. What? That you discovered that you were sad. As you can see, the Mystery immediately gives us a hint from within our own experience. When one remains on the threshold of the faces and the faces are not a way of discovering the One to whom they refer us, there is no correspondence, and sadness appears. That means that the Mystery never leaves us without signs that provide us with a suggestion about the next step to take. This is precious for those of us who want to make a human journey. That we need time to reach the goal is normal — we are poor wretches and we shouldn't be scandalized

by that. The question is whether we use the signs that the Mystery gives us in our experience in order not to get stuck, so that everything becomes part of the journey. We continually verify in our experience the truth of what we are living. For this reason we must be attentive to the warning lights that confirm or deny whether we have remained on the threshold or have really reached the ultimate meaning. There is a passage from the School of Community which is decisive for understanding this as well. Has anyone identified it?

Doing the work of School of Community, the question of the encounter as an “all-embracing historical fact” really struck me. I am 57 years old and have been in the movement since I was fourteen. I have had many encounters, some of which have been fundamental and have given a direction to my life. I came across some people who made the face of Jesus clear to me, and I remember the day and the hour of that encounter. But time is trying me and lately the hardness of living seems to be what is all-embracing. Every day is a struggle with problems that continue to arise on the job, difficulty in relationships, and disappointment about what I can’t do. However, in reading the School of Community I was struck by the last part of point 6: “The encounter we have had, which is all-encompassing by its very nature, in time becomes the true shape of every relationship, the true form by which I look at nature, at myself, at others, and at things. When an encounter is all-embracing, it becomes the shape, not simply the sphere, of relationships” (p. 20). I would like to understand this passage existentially because I feel that for me this is crucial. What does it mean that an encounter becomes the “true shape of every relationship”?

It is wonderful that many of you have grasped the import of this point! Who can help us to understand it?

I will start from a passage that struck me in reading the School of Community for this month because they have a lot to do with what I have been living in the past four years. At the end of point 4 Fr. Giussani says, “The experience we live every day is that men tend to identify the totality of life with something partial and limited. Escaping this partiality is not in our hands. None of us can, alone, recover a true way of looking at reality” (p. 14). In point 6, he says, “An encounter marks the beginning of a journey, it is a moment made up of time and space. It happens at a precise time, one that you can check on your watch. Life is given to us in order to understand that instant more deeply”(p. 19). This encounter is an all-embracing historical fact. Four years ago I got married and my husband and I immediately started to try to have a child, a child who hasn’t arrived yet. There have been some really difficult moments when crying was a daily occurrence, and nobody, neither my husband nor my friends, could calm me down. Everything for me depended on this child who didn’t arrive. (As Fr. Giussani says, I identified the totality of my life with something partial, as if the only possibility of happiness for me was through the answer I had in mind, my desire for motherhood.) At one point my husband suggested to me, “Let’s go to the priest who married us.” Knowing that one of the first things he would asked would be, “Do you do School of Community?” I started reading the School of Community so I would not have to answer “no” ... and how liberating it was! We were reading Why the Church? and at a certain point Fr. Giussani says, “The Church’s function in history [...] is that of the mother calling back her children to the reality of things: man’s dependence on God. [...] If we live the consciousness of our original dependence [...] all problems will fall within a framework which will make solving them easier. [...] This method of looking, in fact, would be focused on Something larger than the individual problem, it would confer on everything the prospect of a constructive path to pursue” (Why the Church, McGill-Queen’s, 2001, pp. 152–54). Together with the School of Community, I

was surrounded by my husband and my friends. One day a friend called me and said, “When you get pregnant, you are happy, but then you realize that not even that is enough for you. The point is what our life rests upon.” Immediately and inexplicably, I stopped crying from one day to the next. I changed, I am serene (so much so that I can tell you all this without crying), and I have not changed because of a definition, but through faces and facts. I found myself on a journey and now have a new way of looking at my difficulty, which continues to exist. What I find in myself is a gladness that doesn’t come from me, which allows me to entrust myself completely to the design of an Other and which ultimately fills me with gratitude. The difficulty and toil continue to be there, but you can look at them serenely. Saint Augustine said, “My heart is restless until it rests in you.” Another must fill my life for me to let go of what I have in mind. I can’t make my desire go away because it exists. Yet now I no longer demand that the answer to it comes in the way I have in mind, but rather I am in a position of waiting for an Other to respond to my desire, and I am striving to grasp that response. In starting again from Christ, this difficulty is no longer a crushing weight. As soon as I move away from Christ, anxiety and fear take over, my thoughts win, crying wins. On the contrary, when I start from Him, the last judgment is this gladness and essential peace that have invaded my life. Looking at all of my life, I know that He doesn’t deceive me. When I decide to start afresh from Christ, the presence of the Lord makes my life truer, more appealing, more human, more beautiful, and that is a miracle (in my eyes and in the eyes of others). Thank you for how you accompany me and for the journey that you indicate to me.

When I first heard you talk about all of this, it struck me very much, because it shed light on the final passage of point 6, which was mentioned before: one can stay inside the movement as a “sphere of relationships” and continue to cry for an unfulfilled desire. You were in a sphere of relationships, yet you continued to cry, you continued to be fixated on a partiality; the encounter you had wasn’t able to become all-encompassing. Last week I went to the Netherlands and found myself in front of two couples who told me that they were also in the condition of not being able to have children. One of the two wives, seeing the gladness on the face of the other, began to make the encounter with her the form in which to live her situation. That made her change. Many times we can live the life of the movement as a sphere of relationships and cry or complain because we don’t recognize the newness it introduces. If the movement doesn’t become all-encompassing, that is, if it doesn’t become “the true shape of every relationship” (p. 20), one can remain within a sphere of relationships and continue to be determined by what is not working (not having children, not being promoted in a job as expected, having a colleague who drives you crazy, etc.). In the end that gets us into trouble and makes us feel disappointed. Yet, as soon as someone gives us a suggestion that makes us experience the encounter as all-encompassing, that is, the shape of every relationship, then everything changes. If it doesn’t go to the core of our experience, the encounter will not have an impact on our way of living. For this I thank you and those friends I met in the Netherlands because you made this passage of the School of Community become flesh in my eyes, which I think is precious for everyone because it provides us a suggestion for our path. If the encounter is not all-encompassing, that is, if it doesn’t become the form and modality of every relationship, Christianity doesn’t penetrate to our core, and therefore we will continue to cry, to be determined by our partialities and by what doesn’t work. Jesus didn’t promise us that everything would go according to our thoughts. The thing that amazes me most about this story is that all three of these women still have no children and yet all three have a different face! The face doesn’t change because my idea of fulfillment of my desire comes true, but because Christ enters our flesh in an all-encompassing way.

That is what Christmas is about. That is why Christ came, to enter the core of our need and respond to it in a surprising way. So, whatever the situation we are in, it will be a beautiful Christmas for everyone!

The next School of Community will be held on Wednesday, January 22nd at 9:00 p.m. During this month we will work on points 7 and 8 of the first chapter of *Generating Traces in the History of the World*.

The Book of the Month for January and February will be *Le mie Letture* [My readings] by Fr. Luigi Giussani, which contains some texts from his readings of authors dear to him. We can see how for him reading Leopardi, Pascoli, Rebora, Péguy, Eliot, and many others was an event. It is therefore a valuable contribution so that we can know the amazing journey of Fr. Giussani, in which all his passion for what is human emerges. Each of us, intellectual or not, can compare his own life with this passion. The book has just been re-edited by BURSaggi.

On this Christmas, we ask the Lord to be able to say “yes” to the way He comes to meet us. Without the yes of Our Lady we would not be here. Without Father Giussani’s yes none of us — absolutely no one! — would be here. Without your yes and my yes now there would be no others. Therefore, let’s live Christmas looking at the power with which Christ enters our life — as He entered the life of Saint Joseph and the shepherds — and from that way of looking will arise the gladness that we will be able to witness to our brothers and sisters at this moment in time in which nihilism increasingly pervades our culture.

Merry Christmas to everyone.

Veni Sancte Spiritus